

## **A Short but Exciting Visit to Nottingham University, England June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003**

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Ever since my good friend Fujia Yang became the first Chinese scientist installed as the Chancellor of Nottingham University (NU) on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001, I have wanted to visit this university. I was driven by my curiosity to see for myself how NU could remove a strong British tradition of having a distinguished British citizen in this position, by appointing a Chinese, distinguished as Yang is, to such a position. Of course, Fujia has on many occasions encouraged me to make a trip to visit the university which he is now intimately connected.

Since then, I also found out that a group of UTD scientists, led by a distinguished UTD faculty member, Emily Tobey -- who holds the Nelle C. Johnston Chair of Communication Disorders in Children in the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences and whose research focuses on communication disorder, Cochlear Implants, and collaboration with the scientists at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center on functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) -- has strong connections with her scientific counterparts in Nottingham University. She too has urged me to visit Nottingham University.

When the opportunity came, I could not resist. On June 24, 2003, I spent an entire day at NU. My visit was meticulously orchestrated by Emma Graham, the assistant to the Vice Chancellor (which is the US equivalent of a President) of the University, Sir Colin Campbell.

The university has two campuses. The original 350 acres campus, with beautiful and well-manicured landscaping and a new campus called "Jubilee campus", a few miles from the original one, which houses among other departments, the Business School and a most unusual library. I was very impressed with the D. H. Lawrence Center for Performance Art, which has an adjacent lake. The day I was there, there was deep blue sky and bright sunshine, which makes the centre looks exceptionally beautiful.

I first had a half an hour meeting with the Pro-Vice Chancellor in charge of Asia Development and also the Dean of the School of Management, Dr. Ian Gow. During the meeting, a new assistant of Dr. Gow, Dr. Yongjiang Wang also participated in the discussion. Our discussion ranged from the development of NU's Asian campuses, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and in Ninbo, China (which is still under the planning stage, I understand). We also discussed briefly the development of UTD's programs in research and graduate education. Dr. Gow was very interested in my description of the development and growth of UTD, and wanted me to repeat some of this discussion at

lunch with the physicists and the hearing specialist from the medical school who would join us then.

Just before lunch, I had a short but intense discussion with Professor G. M. O'Donoghue who is Professor of Neurotology. Before my coming to NU, Dr. O'Donoghue and Emily Tobey have had several email exchanges already. Apparently he and Emily have been talking seriously about possible collaboration for quite sometime already.

At lunch, besides Dr. Gow and Dr. O'Donoghue, two physics professors, Dr. P. H. Beton (head of physics) and Dr. Peter Morris (head of the Magnetic Resonance Centre) also joined us.

During lunch, I began to realize that there are intensive research activities in fMRI, nanotechnology and semi-conductor physics in NU. For example, the Magnetic Resonance Center is not only installing a 3 tesla fMRI machine, but they plan to have a 7 tesla machine by the end of 2004. With increased magnetic intensity, there will be additional technical problems of the machine, which will require the work of engineers and physicists. Since the collaboration of UTD and UT Southwestern Medical Center are still in the discussion stage of purchasing a 3 tesla machine solely for research purposes, it is obvious that certainly in equipment, NU is ahead of us.

In nanoscience, there are strong collaborations between NU's physicists, chemists and (quite surprisingly for me) pharmacists! The details of the research areas can be found in the website <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/physics/research/nano/research.htm>

It was fortunate that just the week before, UTD's folks in the NanoTech Institute had a major technological breakthrough (<http://www.utdallas.edu/utdgeneral/news/20030611nano.html>). So the timing could not have been better to talk about future collaborations between the scientists of our two institutions.

In the afternoon, I visited the research facilities in nanotechnology, semi-conductors as well as the magnetic resonance center. Although I am hardly an expert in any of these areas, I could detect high level of activities as well as enthusiasm.

In a subsequent email from Dr. O'Donoghue, he mentioned that

*"We identified a number of areas that are ripe for collaborative research. In my own case, Professor Emily Tobey's team at Callier have already established links with our group in the area of cochlear implantation. You are aware through Professor Morris of our interests in functional brain mapping with fMRI. You did not have an opportunity to visit the Institute of Hearing Research on campus - this is a Medical Research Council's unit (equivalent to your NIH) and the focus of its major research programme over the next 5 years will be in the cognitive sciences related to hearing research - which will find a resonance with work in progress at Callier. Nanotechnology has not yet been applied*

*to this field and there is good reason to believe that this may well play a significant part in the communication technologies of the future.”*

My wife and I had a most enjoyable and substantive (intellectually as well as gastronomically) dinner with Professor Gow and his wife, Professor Douglas Tallack, Pro Vice-Chancellor, and Professor of American Studies and his wife.

During dinner, I learned a great deal from Douglas and Ian about the issues surrounding their endeavors. I was impressed to learn about the vision of the Chancellor of NU's globalization by extending campuses into Malaysia and Ningbo in China. The tasks seem formidable, but I am sure that with careful planning and marketing, this could be another innovation of this great university that others may want to follow.

We have agreed the following action items:

1. I will write a report of my visit (and here it is).
2. I will inform my colleagues in nanotech, fMRI and Cochlear implantation of what I saw and learned. Needless to say, I saw a great deal of opportunity for collaborations.
3. I will discuss with a member of my external research advisory council Dr. Hwa A. Lim, who has a great deal of connections with Malaysia, about how we could work with NU's Malaysia's campus.
4. I also proposed to the leadership of NU that at a suitable time, NU consider sending a delegation to north Texas. As the host, I promise that we will work hard to make their visit intellectually worthwhile.